



Cat Scratching Behavior

Scratching is a natural behavior for cats, as natural as breathing. Therefore, the solution is not to stop the cat from scratching, but instead to redirect the cat to an appropriate scratching surface, namely a scratching post or pad. At the same time, the cat must be humanely deterred from scratching the inappropriate surface.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SCRATCHING POST?

1. Height – the post needs to be tall enough for your cat to stretch and extend in order to get a full and satisfying scratch.
2. Stability – the post must be stable. If it wobbles, your cat won't like it, and if it topples over your cat won't want to get near it again. Watch a cat scratch – they hunker down and scratch and pull with such vigor that they need a stable surface to suit their scratching needs.
3. Material – the best material for cat scratching posts is sisal fabric. Not sisal rope, but sisal fabric. This woven material provides great texture for shredding – which cats love to do when scratching, and it feels good on their paws. When a cat scratches the sisal material, he can drag his claws down this satisfying material over and over in a continuous motion. In contrast, sisal rope creates an interrupted scratch – scratch, bump, scratch, bump, scratch, bump. Not very satisfying.
4. Location – one of the keys to getting your cat to use his post is to place it in a prominent area of your, and his, living space. Why? Because one of the reasons cats scratch is to mark their territory, so the post has to be in the places your cat likes to be. Cats are generally social scratchers so hiding a scratcher (and cat towers) off in a corner may be visually pleasing to you but it won't be a pleasing scratching option to your cat. Your scratching options need to be in the living space, often directly by the furniture you want your cat to leave alone. It's also important to note that some cats are horizontal scratchers and some are vertical. Provide them with both options as you learn their preference (a tall cat post can easily be laid on its side).

OUR POST RECOMMENDATIONS

We highly recommend the “SmartCat Ultimate Scratching Post” available at chewy.com, amazon.com and Petco stores. It offers the height, stability and sisal material. And, it lasts for years! You may need more than one if your cat has more than one favorite place to scratch.

Also, we recommend simple cardboard scratchers to accompany the above Post as they are affordable and cats love them. You can put out multiple cardboard scratchers, sprinkle them with catnip to draw your cat to them and place them around the home to easily satisfy your cats desire to scratch on a moment’s notice.

DETECTING INAPPROPRIATE SCRATCHING

1. Protecting Furniture – while you are enticing your cat to use his new scratching post and cardboard scratchers, you can temporarily cover couches/chairs with a tight-fitting sheet, apply double-sided tape such as Sticky Paws, use the humane aversion product SSSCat and/or apply Soft Paws nail caps. Remember, yelling does not work. Cats are supposed to scratch. We simply need to provide them with the right places to do so. Sometimes that post needs to go directly beside the inappropriate scratching location. Once the cat learns to use the post, it can slowly be transitioned into the desired location.
2. Playtime – an under-stimulated cat will often scratch out of boredom. If you are having this issue, then be sure you are providing your cat with 2-3 interactive play sessions daily. We recommend the wand toys made by Go Cat to really get your cat leaping, pouncing and chasing after a toy (Da Bee and Da Bird are both excellent toys). The Cat Dancer is also another great interactive toy. And provide your cat with many solo toys he can enjoy when you are away such as pom pom balls, pipe cleaners, milk bottle tabs, water bottle caps, rattle mice and other small plush catnip infused toys.
3. Nail trimming – keeping your cat’s nails trimmed will help keep his claws healthy and the scratching under control. Cat’s generally need their front paw nails trimmed every 3-4 weeks. If left untrimmed, nails can split and there is a risk of the nail growing in to the paw pad which is painful and can require surgery. A Humane Tomorrow volunteer is always happy to teach you how to trim nails.

For additional help with inappropriate scratching or any other cat behavior concern, please email GoodKitty@HumaneTomorrow.org.